

Chapter 9: Stories:

Hands of the Cause of God stories:

Being in the right place at the right time! These recollections which I choose to share are ones which could have happened only at a special time in history.

Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum:

My first encounter with Rúhíyyih Khánum was in St. Thomas in 1970 when she and Violette Nakhjavání came for a visit.

We knew, of course, who she was, but it does not prepare one for the force of both her personality and depth. There was something about her that I could not put my finger on. After she left I thought about it a lot, and three months later it suddenly dawned on me, she displayed the quality of majesty. No wonder I didn't recognize it, I had never seen it manifested before.

However there was another side to her that anyone who has spent any time with her at all will agree, she could use a very open, blunt way of expressing her opinion.

During this trip she visited our home. The area where we did all our entertaining and visiting was on the second floor. At the top of the stairs was a large painting of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that had been painted for us by a dear friend. She stopped in her tracks as she saw it, turned to me and said "Burn it, there isn't an artist alive who can properly paint the essence of Abdu'l-Baha". Wow! As I was a fairly new Bahá'í and didn't know one was supposed to keep ones opinion to themselves when around her, and just say "Yes Ma'am", I started to give her arguments as to why I shouldn't do that. My closing and final point which I thought was the clincher was "...but Rúhíyyih Khánum, this was done for us in love". She looked at me with a look mixed with annoyance and impatience, and said "Pat, people commit murder for love".

I did take it down as long as she was there, but could not bring myself to burn it.

When she left St. Thomas, I could hear my heart breaking. I can still see myself standing at the airport watching her go. She suddenly turned around, saw the look on my face, and came back to me, saying "Oh Pat". Then with a look of both annoyance and affection on her face leaned down and gave me a kiss on both cheeks.

She visited Barbados in 1972 where we had moved as pioneers. We asked her to dinner and she and Violette graciously consented. As she walked into the house she saw an abstract painting hanging on the wall, stopped, looked at me and said "Pat, did you have this in St. Thomas?" I said "Yes Ma'am, you didn't like it there either". She burst out laughing, I gathered not many people talked to her like that, and thank God, she was not displeased with me.

Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm:

In 1978, I was privileged to attend the Five Day International Convention in Haifa Israel, along with hundreds of other delegates from around the world.

One day, I woke up so sick I could not get out of bed. I was devastated! How could I miss even one of the five precious days, but nevertheless, I could not get out of bed. So I stayed and prayed and prayed and prayed.

Suddenly an idea came to me, I wondered if I could, somehow, get to Rúhíyyih Khánúm and ask her for prayers or something! But it didn't take long for me to realize how impossible that was. Ah, but another idea came, I bet if I could somehow get hold of Violette Nakhjavání, surely she could get to Rúhíyyih Khánúm for me. It also didn't take a lot

of time for me to realize that wasn't going to happen either. So, back to praying.

The next day I woke and was well! I was able to attend the sessions for that day. During a lull in one of the meetings, I got up and wandered into one of the halls and stood there all by myself. I look up and there, coming up the hall, was Rúhíyyih Khánúm, all by herself. That stunned me, as I had never, ever, seen her alone at an International Convention. I knew her from her visits to the West Indies and had the great honour to take her to media interviews, etc, as well as having her to my home. As she passed, she nodded, saying, "How are you? I responded with "I'm fine." She stopped dead in her tracks, looked at me and said with an emphatic tone as only she could, "I asked you how you were" Oops, I remembered my previous day's wish and replied, "Much better Khánúm, thank you!". She nodded and went on her way.

After this session was over, I was leaving, and up the corridor strides Rúhíyyih Khánúm, Violette Nakhjavání and the usual crowd of those around her. As Violette spotted me, and without missing a step, says to her "Khánúm, you remember Pat don't you? " Khánúm turned to her, without missing a step either says, "Of course I remember her, I saw her earlier."

Wow, the Holy Land, both of my heartfelt wishes granted!

Abu'l-Qásim Faizi:

When I took my Pilgrimage in 1972 and combined it with a teaching trip around the world, and knowing that I would be traveling in India, one person that I really wanted to meet was Mr. Faizi. There had been several Hands who had traveled in the Caribbean, but not he. As I was a fairly new Bahá'í, this was a new feeling, unexplained, but strong.

Alas, as I traveled through India, when I was in the north of the country, he was in the south, when I traveled south he moved to north. It was one of only two disappointments during my whole trip in what was an incredible time for me. So, I told myself, Patricia, don't complain!

The following year, 1973, was the year of the Bahá'í International Convention. Frank and I were both on the National Assembly and thus accorded the wonderful bounty of attending as delegates. My wild story on how we got the money to attend I've already told in the Barbados chapter.

One day after a session on Mount Carmel, a group of us were standing in front of the entrance to the Shrine of the Báb, trying to decide where to have dinner. As we chatted, we saw a long limousine pull up, the driver's door opens and out jumps Ian Semple, a member of the Universal House of Justice, who runs around and opens the door of the limousine. As we watch with open mouths several Hands of the Cause of God get out of the car! But they are practically running towards the entrance to the Shrine, not stopping, not looking sideways, just straight ahead.

As the last Hand jumps out I see its Mr. Faizi. Oh my, my heart starts to pound. As he reaches the entrance he stops, lifts his head up for a minute, and then walks straight over to me, takes my hand in his two hands, and says "My name is Faizi". Not another word is spoken; he turns and continues to walk into the Pilgrim House with the other Hands for their unscheduled visit with the Bahá'ís. He had heard my heart!

Rahmatu'llah Muhajir:

During the visit of Dr. Muhajir in 1972 to Barbados, I was in the throes of deciding if I wanted to or could make the Pilgrimage to Israel that I had applied for only months ago.

After hearing this, He then proceeded to turn my life around by insisting that in connection with my Pilgrimage, I should make a teaching trip around the World.

This is not the forum for the resulting stories of my Global Teaching Trip. Joyce Olinga has made a DVD containing all of the stories from this trip. She has done an amazing job both of editing and including photos. It can be obtained from her web site. Her remarks re: this DVD entitled "Pat Paccassi's Incredible 1972 Global Travel Teaching Trip" are as follows:

"As many of you know Pat Paccassi is a long-time pioneer and a dear friend from my years of pioneering in the Caribbean. In 2011, it was my honor to video tape Pat during my visit to St. Lucia as she wanted to leave something for her family and Baha'is there. Once I began to edit, I became so inspired and moved that I felt compelled to make it a documentary available for the whole world. Thus, her interview is tightly edited with photos from her life and journey, photos of my trips to Uganda and the Caribbean as well as other contributors. This video shares a glimpse of what it was like to pioneer and travel-teach in the 70's.

The documentary has now successfully passed the U.S. Baha'i Reviewing Committee and can be offered for sale for \$15. including US shipping from Olinga Productions, P.O. Box 14232, Maryland Hts, Mo 63043.

Pat delightfully shares her early pioneering days and incredible journey to 14 countries with her unique sense of humor, boundless faith, unwavering courage and love of Bahá'u'lláh.

Baha'is throughout the Caribbean and many parts of the world will get to see many sites and gatherings including priceless photos of the Houses of The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. In addition, Mrs. Paccassi, like Bahá'í pioneers in the 1970's, was blessed with having personal experiences and guidance from Hands of the Cause of God.

How grateful I am to have produced this precious glimpse of our Bahá'í history and may it inspire you as well to share the Glad Tidings that the Promised One has come!

With Caribbean waves of love and happiness,“

- Joyce Olinga OlingaProductions@mac.com

John Robarts:

In 1980, St. Lucia had the pleasure of a visit from John and Audrey Robarts. They were such a delightful couple, he with his stories and laughter and she with her laughter and support of him. During this time frame Mr. Robart's memory loss was becoming apparent. He would be telling a wonderful story and forget some detail or a name and he would look at her and she immediately provided what he needed.

Later in talking to her by herself, she said that she really had to pay attention during his stories, even though she had heard them many times, as she never knew when he was going to need a detail.

During this visit, he insisted on taking both the Bloodworth family, Keith, Stephanie, and their boys Ruhi and Badi, Canadian pioneers, and our family, the Paccassi's, me, Frank and our youngest daughter, Judy out to dinner. No matter what we said, he said he wanted to do that for us as he understood we probably didn't go out to dinner very often.

One night I cooked a big dinner and went to pick them up at their hotel. He asked where we were going that night for dinner, and I replied I know a nice Italian place. "Great he said, I love Italian food". So when I drove up into our driveway, he got it! They both had a good laugh and more importantly enjoyed their Italian dinner. Audrey even asked me how I knew green split pea soup was John's favorite, and I replied it was one of mine as well, and cooks always make what they like to eat!

Collis Featherstone:

In 1984, St. Lucia had the distinct pleasure of having Mr. and Mrs. Collis Featherstone be present for the National Convention. He was also at the ground breaking ceremony of the National Centre property on the Morne which was a lovely site overlooking the sea and the capital Castries.

Frank and I were the lucky pioneers who picked them up at the airport and took them to their hotel. We sat chatting for a while, and I then informed them of their schedule on the island which included dinner at one of the pioneer families home, the Babahani's, that evening.

Mr. Featherstone then began to speak as to how wonderful and gracious it was of the pioneers who, in spite of their busy full lives of home, family and Bahá'í duties take the time to have them to dinner. I sat listening to this with growing impatience. When he was finished I said to him, "Mr. Featherstone, you know full well that the pioneers flip each other to see who gets to have you for dinner"

They both burst out laughing. They knew it was true!

Pat's miscellaneous stories:

Learning a New Culture:

I am not going to even attempt to go very deeply into this subject, but a few prime examples do come to mind that I think pretty much explain some of a pioneer's experiences. The first two were in the 1980's so a lot of that has changed.

1) Keith and Stephanie Bloodworth and their infant son, Ruhi, first came to St. Lucia in 1978 to pioneer. Being devoted and obedient servants of the Faith, they soon moved to the village of Dennery that needed help.

They lived in a house on the beach and on the main street. They had no stove so cooked everything on a coal pot. Keith had by this time obtained a job teaching Art in the Secondary School in Castries, the capital city. It was about an hour's bus drive to his school, and classes started at 8.00 am. That meant that Stephanie rose every morning at 4.30 am to start preparing breakfast and his lunch to take to school.

Steph bought some groceries as most did, in a small shop on the main street. Soon after they got there, Stephanie went to buy a few things in the shop. She asked for a dozen eggs and the shocked clerk said "Oh no, Miss, I can't sell one person that many eggs!" A small shop carried only a small amount of anything most of the time. Most people, knowing this bought exactly the number of eggs that were needed at the moment. Stephanie said all right, give me what you can, and I will also take a pound of cheese. The clerk stopped, swirled her eyes to one side, thought about that for a bit, and then with an incredulous look said "Miss, that's 16 ounces!" The quantity of what one bought at a time applied to the cheese as well!

2) Back in the old days when I was still smoking, I was in Grenada on a teaching trip. We were in a village with its shop on the main street. I went in and asked the man for a carton of cigarettes. He looked at me, and said "Oh Miss, sorry, I don't sell wholesale." Later I found out that most people bought one or, at the most, two cigarettes at a time.

Haifa:

During a trip to Haifa, Israel for my second Pilgrimage in 2004, I was standing in one of the meeting halls waiting to go to the next scheduled event.

While there, a young Persian man came moving very quickly by me, skidded to a stop, and said to me "I am taking some people to the next meeting in my car, would you like to come with us? I, of course, was delighted, being long past my high energy ability to walk up high hills, and I replied in my most polite manner, "I wouldn't mind". He looked at me, hesitated and then repeated exactly what he had asked me in the first place, only in a slower, louder tone of voice. I realized what had just happened; he had not understood the idiom. I then said, in my most polite manner, "That would be very nice, thank you, I would like a ride." He beamed and proceeded to give me directions where to meet him.

Mamie Seto:

In 1953, Mamie Seto, a long time Bahá'í was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States. In the opening of the World Crusade (1953-1963) the Guardian issued a call to pioneering. She was one of the five

members who resigned from the National Spiritual Assembly and went to a pioneering post. Mrs. Seto went to Japan.

I first became aware of her when she came to Sacramento, California in 1964 to speak at a meeting sponsored by the local spiritual assembly. To the best of my knowledge I could not have done anything other than say hello, as it was a large gathering and I was a new Bahá'í. Actually, I don't even remember saying that.

The following year, our family was at Bahá'í Summer School at Geyserville, California. I was sitting with a gathering listening to one of the talks being given under the wonderful, large tree that was its hallmark feature.

My first born daughter, Lynn, who had been out playing with the other children, came up to me quietly and said "Mom, a lady wants to talk to you." I said "OK, but not now honey, I am listening to this talk" She in turn, who was normally a well behaved and obedient child kept insisting that I come "Now" as the lady said to her "Child, go get your Mother" and she also said "Now". By this time the whispered conversation I was having with Lynn was beginning to penetrate the Bahá'is near me, and with them looking at us, I said, alright and got up to follow Lynn to the lady.

As I went across the all but empty field I could see a woman sitting in a chair all by herself. As I got closer, I could see it was Mamie Seto! I went up to her and said "Mrs. Seto, you wanted to see me?" She looked up, looked straight in my eyes and said "I want you to go pioneering!" I was really taken back, but as Frank and I had already made that decision ourselves, I told her that. She nodded, said "Good" and put her head back down, with nothing more to say.

In the next months, our efforts to go pioneering seemed to be stymied. Frank, with an engineering background and experience, had sent many resumes looking for a job. There were no replies. During that period we again went to Geyserville to hear Hand of the Cause of God, Bill Sears speak.

As one might expect, considering the esteem the Bahá'ís hold for a Hand of the Cause, the meeting hall was packed. His talk had already started; we were sitting near the back. Our row began to shuffle a bit to allow someone who had arrived late to take a seat at the far end of the row. As she passed me, I saw it was Mamie Seto. She didn't look at me, continued to her seat, but then leaned forward, somehow knowing I was still looking at her, and she said "You're still here". I whisper back, "We are going!" She nodded and our conversation was once again terminated.

Not too long after, in October 1965, our pioneering wishes were granted. We went first to Puerto Rico. Frank got a job and lost it. The Foreign Goals Committee said to try St. Thomas as they were to form the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Leeward, Windward and Virgin Islands. Frank did get a job there and we moved in July 1966.

In October 1967, Six Intercontinental Conferences were called by the Universal House of Justice, the closest to us was being held was in Chicago, Illinois. We were privileged to attend.

During a break in the sessions, we were standing in one of the corridors. I looked up to see the Bahá'ís parting as if it were the Red Sea and in the middle walking towards us was Mamie Seto! I was astounded! As she got to me, she stopped, looked at me, and said "You're back", I said "Oh no, Mrs. Seto, we are just here for the Conference". She nodded, said "Good", gave me kiss on the cheek and was on her way!!

A few years later, one night I awoke from a sound sleep, thinking "Mamie Seto is dying". One of my friends in the States who later knew of my earlier encounters with Mrs. Seto contacted me with the same sad information. I only replied "I heard".

I swear, that is the complete conversations I had with Mrs. Seto. How did she know? What a wonderful and mysterious

religion we belong to. We have guardian angels, who for the most part, we don't even know about. God is good!

Two unexpected events on Pilgrimage:

In 1972 I was most fortunate to be able to go on Pilgrimage to the Holy Land and visit the Bahá'í Holy Shrines in Israel. Our family was pioneering in Barbados at that time.

In those earlier days if one applied from somewhere other than a large country, one could expect to go in a relatively short time. This was, I suppose, because of the smaller number of Bahá'ís who applied from around the world, and a wider representation of more countries attending was desirable.

At any rate, within months of applying, I was there. This too, is a good story, but for another day.

When I was a new Bahá'í in Carmichael, California in 1964, I was often dismayed at the laxity that Bahá'ís took to showing up at events on time. I have always been time orientated, so this bothered me, but I was told, "Oh, don't worry, this is Bahá'í time".

During the Pilgrimage, a visit to meet with the members of the Universal House of Justice was scheduled for 4:00 pm on one of our first days. What a wonderful prospect! Our small group of Pilgrims gathered before time in the room where we were to meet them. We stood around, chatting a bit, and without noticeable intrusion, chairs began to appear, and the pilgrims were herded into them. The chatting stopped and we sat quietly for a bit, and then, an adjoining door to our room opened and out filed the members of the Universal House of Justice! It was truly one of the most thrilling moments of my life. I still feel the emotion well within me when I think of it. I looked up at the clock, it said 4.00pm. I thought: "Now, that is Bahá'í time."

They spoke to us, and afterwards they stayed and chatted with us. I noticed that most of the Bahá'ís had opened their prayer books, asking each member to sign them. I, of course, wanted to, but just couldn't make myself do it. It just didn't seem right. It was like they were movie stars or famous musicians or authors, and that was not how I felt about them. So, the moment passed and my prayer book remained unsigned.

A few days later, I went to the larger house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which was then being used as the meeting place for the Universal House of Justice and its staff. I was to have lunch with one of the staff that I had known before.

As I was waiting for her, Mr. Hushmand Fatheazam, a member of the Universal House of Justice, was just going out to lunch. I did not know him other than the brief meeting that the pilgrims had previously had. But as he saw me, he stopped and said, "Wait a minute, I have something for you". For me? He went back into his office and came out right away with a book in his hand. It was a copy of his book, the "The New Garden." I opened it and he had signed it and inscribed a short message to me which started with my name! Again, how do they do this; how do they know?
